Critical evaluation of websites is very important. Anyone can start their own website, and there are many reasons people have for creating one. Because of the huge amount of information available on the Internet, it is very important that researchers be aware of how to critically evaluate the quality of a website. Use the 5 Ws to do it.

**WHO**

* Who is responsible for the page?
* Check the author’s credentials. Is the author an expert in the field?
* Does the website have a reputable organization or expert supporting it?
* Are there organizational or author biases?
* Can the author be contacted for clarification?

**WHAT**

* Is the information factual or opinion?
* What is the purpose of the page?
* Is the webpage a thinly disguised commercial or opinion page with self-serving motivations?
* Can the content be verified in a traditional edited print / electronic source?
* What is the quality of the page layout and graphical images? Does it look professional?
* Are there a lot of advertisements on the page?

[This information from the University of Maine Library has been modified by Christine Bushong,]

**WHEN**

* When was the website created or last updated? Credible ones will include that information.
* How old is the information or data on the web page? Is it still reliable?

**WHERE**

* Is the information from a reliable source?
* Where did the information come from?
  + .edu = an educational institution
  + .gov = a government entity
  + .com = a commercial (business) organization; may also be .biz
  + .mil = a military organization of the U.S. government
  + .org = an organization or group that doesn’t fit into one of the other categories.

**WHY**

* Why is this information being published?
* Why do you need this information? Does it apply to your research needs?

**Remember**: Whenever possible, Internet information should be verified by a reputable print source or database that has editorial review. There is much misinformation scattered on the Internet. An author may modify content any time. Authors may also show bias by using opinion verbs or appealing to the emotions of the reader. These are signs the website is not reliable.